Silver Colored Memories TN: Silver means Gin.

A story from before Minowa Gin carried out her "duty" for the first time.

Gin was on the training ground of the Shinju-kan, waving around the twin axes that served as her personal weapons.

For a simple elementary school girl, they seemed all too large and bulky. Still, Gin was swinging them with ease. Clad in her special clothes, the girl who wielded these superhuman weapons was a "hero" tasked with the duty to protect the world.

"Uaaaah! Haah! Ryaah!!"

Every time the girl swung her enormous axes, drops of sweat were flying through the air.

There was no style associated with Gin's twin axes like there is archery for bows or spearmanship for spears. While martial arts styles for axes did exist in human history, the axes used in these were im most cases small ones such as tomahawks. But Gin's weapons were much larger and of a different shape than tomahawks.

Thus, most of her movements were self-taught. They were too simple to be called a technique - to put it bluntly, she was just swinging the axes around with all of her strength. However, it was far more powerful to swing them with the strength of a hero, which far surpasses that of a normal person, than using any half-baked techniques. Especially when her opponents were non-humanoid.

But this was a perfect fit for Gin's personality.

Fighting solely by instinct and intuition. That way, your fighting kicks in. As your fighting spirit wells up, your movements get keener and each blow hits heavier.

Gin did not yet know what kind of beings those enemies she would fight were.

When she was told that she was supposed to defend the Shinju as a hero, she sort of understood that it was a serious matter. But she did not grasp exactly

how serious it would be.

Going by both her weapons and her personality, the one thing that could be said for sure was that she would fight the enemy at the frontline.

She was prepared for that.

She didn't like studying very much, and she wasn't cut out to be a leader either.

Thus, her role had to be that of a brawler in the vanguard. That's what she was good at. She thought that she could show off her strength to her heart's content that way. As this was her way of thinking, she wasn't very afraid of her duty.

(For starters, I've gotta work on my skills and my body)

She was supposed to fight together with Washio Sumi and Nogi Sonoko, who were chosen as heroes just like her. She would be having joint exercises with them in the near future.

(Washio-san and Nogi-san, huh? I really want to do this properly.)

"Is what I used to think back then."

Gin was talking to Sumi and Sonoko about the old times as she rocked her baby brother Kintarou.

Year 298 of the Divine Era, the first days of spring. The sun was blazing down from a cloudless sky. The strong sunshine made it clear that it would get even hotter.

"So you had that kind of ambition even before our duty started, Gin...? Everyone has a different reason to protect the Shinju-sama and the country. Gin, this is exactly how a subject of this country is supposed to behave. I'm glad to be able sense such a strong desire to protect the nation in you."

Sumi was nodding with a dead serious expression as she heard Gin's story.

"No idea what's that about subjects or protecting the nation, but this really isn't anything special."

"Mino-san is so admirable". I was always thinking 'the training is too hard" and 'I wanna go back to Sancho soon"."

"Basically, you were sleepy... well, that's very much like you, Sonocchi."

Sumi was a bit astounded but also amused by Sonoko's words. Sancho is the pillow she always sleeps on at home. It isn't related to Mexicans (the people of a country that used to exist in the past) in any way.

While Gin was talking to the other two, Kintarou started to get fussy in her arms. As the younger one of her little brothers, Kintarou couldn't walk yet. Gin tried to soothe the restless Kintarou with a "Hey! There, there. No need to cry, mai buraza!" Just as she did that, Kintarou stopped crying and began to laugh.

As gently as if she was handling a treasure, Gin put Kintarou back in his baby bed.

"You really seem more like a mother than like a big sister, Gin."

"It's true". Mama Mino-san, please hold and soothe me too"."

"Like I could carry someone as big as you! You should have asked eleven years earlier."

While the three were chatting like that, something hit Sumi's back with a thump. Sumi turned around and found Gin's first younger brother Tetsuo attacking her back with the plastic model of an airplane.

"Boooom, it's a Zero fighter! Kamikaze attaaaack!"

"That's wrong, Tetsuo-kun. The proper way to call it isn't 'Zero fighter', but 'Reisen'. Also, if you reinterpret the kamikaze operations carried out by Reisen and their historical significance to-"

"Hey, don't teach weird stuff to Tetsuo."

Gin gave Sumi a light karate chop to her forehead.

"But this isn't weird stuff..."

Sumi pouted for a moment, but quickly changed her mind. Indeed, it was too soon to tell him about the kamikaze attacks. There was no need to be impatient, it's better to take it easy and enlighten him little by little.

"I can still sense danger from you, Sumi..."

Gin watched Sumi closely.

"Come on, Neechan! let's play!" said Tetsuo, holding the airplane in one hand and a toy robot in the other.

"Don't be selfish now Tetsuo. Can't you see that your big sister has guests right now?"

"Hmph, it's always like that these days. Hey, Sumi-neechan, Sonoko-neechan, listen. Lately, Neechan is talking about Sumi-neechan and Sonoko-neechan all the time, even at home. She's always saying stuff like 'what should we three play today' and-"

"Hey, Tetsuo! Watch your mouth!"

Her little brother's accusation had Gin blushing.

"So that's how it is". Mino-san's always talking about us"."

"I don't dislike it, at least."

"Ah, come on! It's embarrassing! Tetsuo, I'll play with you later!"

"Yahoo, nice!"

With his plastic models in both hands, Tetsuo left the room.

"Geez..."

The flustered Gin's cheeks were still faintly red.

"We're like best buddies already, huh"."

"I feel like our bonds are just getting stronger and stronger as we have to deal with training, our duty and everything else."

"Buddies and bonds, huh. Yeah, that's gotta be it." said Gin, looking directly at Sumi and Sonoko.

"Sumi, Sonoko. I'm glad that you're there. Sonoko's our leader, and Sumi's giving her advice. Those are things I couldn't do. I've really got it easy compared to you."

"Gin..."

"Mino-san..."

"So when it comes to fighting, I've gotta work that much harder to make it up to you! I'll work about two or three times harder than usual. Basically, you can leave the vanguard to Gin-sama as always!"

Neither Sumi nor Sonoko thought that Gin had it easy. On the contrary, they wondered just how often Gin's vigor and indomitable spirit had saved them.

That night, Sumi and Sonoko stayed over at the Minowa residence.

The three kept chatting until late at night. Gin talked about the cat she picked up and took care of now. Sonoko told them about a new novel she started working on recently. They discussed how to spend this year's summer vacation. Kintarou and Tetsuo. Their grades at school.

Even if they ran out of topics to talk about: as long as the three were together, no matter what topic they talked about or what things they did, it would be fun.

A few days later.

Gin seemed a bit strange that day. In the time before homeroom and during the breaks, Gin is always busy with her classmates. But today, she was just sitting at her desk, lost in thought. Her deep frown made it obvious that she was worrying about something.

"Sonocchi, what is wrong with Gin?"

"Hmm, I wonder. Maybe there was something she didn't like in today's lunch"?"

"But to look so troubled about such a small thing... well, it's Gin after all."

"Right?"

Sumi and Sonoko watched Gin worriedly.

Should they talk to her at such a time? But maybe her problem is something she doesn't want others to hear. Maybe it's better to stay quiet? But then

again, being ignored by your friends like that... those thoughts were spinning in Sumi's head. Unlike Gin, Sumi didn't have a lot of friends, so she was severely lacking experience when it comes to socializing. She wasn't sure how much distance she was supposed to keep or how she should deal with her friends at times like these.

While Sumi was pondering about that, Sonoko stood up from her chair and approached Gin.

"Hey-heeey, Mino-san. What'cha worryin' about, YO? Did ya not like today's lunch, YO? If ya don't like kitsune udon, I'm gonna eat it for YO! YO!"

She rapped it for some reason.

Because Sonoko started the conversation, Sumi could build up the resolve to ask her.

"You're making such a serious face, is something troubling you?"

"Eh? Ah, sorry about that. Seems like I made you worry. Yeah, I guess I need some advice from you, mai furenzu! And Sonoko, you won't get my udon."

"Awww, too bad."

Sonoko looked dejected.

What Gin was worried about was Tetsuo's approaching birthday. She wanted to give him a present, but had no idea what it should be.

"What he said is true, I've been spending less time with him these days. I'd like to give him a present and make him happy on his birthday, at least."

When their duty commenced in earnest, the three heroes' free time was cut short so that they could devote more time to their training. In consequence, they also had less opportunities to spend with their families.

For this reason, she wanted to something for her little brother as his sister.

"Sumi, Sonoko. Do you have any good ideas?"

"Mhmmm..."

"I wonder what would be nice~?"

Sumi and Sonoko pondered. Right now, Tetsuo is five years old. The two weren't sure what kind of present a young boy would like, either.

"Anyways, worrying about it won't help. Let's move out for now."

The three went to Ines. Ines is a shopping mall in front of the station, the largest of its kind in the town. It is said that you can get absolutely anything at Ines. Because of its spaciousness, the great number of stores, the broad assortment of goods and the function as an entertainment facility that it has started to fulfill, even families like to spend their weekends at Ines.

The three were chatting as they walked through Ines.

"First of all, we have to get familiar with the trends and strategies*. According to an old book about the art of war, the preparation before a battle is what decides between victory and defeat."

"Yeah. I don't know what battle you want to fight, but it's true that the trends and strategies are key."

"What kind of present did you give Tetsuo-kun on his last birthday?"

"Well, this year's the first time I'm giving him one. But mom and dad got him an R/C car last year. Tetsuo was super happy."

"An R/C car~! So maybe a toy would be best~?"

"Probably... also, is there anything that Tetsuo-kun likes? A book he's reading, a TV show he never misses, or some sort of hobby - something like that."

"Err, he isn't collecting anything in particular, probably. He's not much of a reader, same as me. I guess his favorite shows are tokusatsu or monster movies? Like, the Sunday morning ones with heroes. Where they can get super huge for three minutes and fight monsters and stuff."

"I see, so he's a completely ordinary boy..."

"He also said that he likes Sumi-oneechan a lot."

"Wha-!?"

Gin giggled teasingly with a "nihihi".

"But that's enviable". A birthday present, huh. I never got anything like that." said Sonoko, sounding a bit sad.

"Eh, seriously?"

Sonoko's words came as a surprise to Sumi. The Nogis are an influential family that could compete for the top spot within the Taisha. On the occasion of their daughter Sonoko's birthday, they would surely prepare an extravagant gift for her.

"Yeah. For example, you know how you'd sometimes say 'my birthday's coming soon, it would be so nice if I got that as a present" to yourself"? Whenever I do that, I get it delivered the next day. So there's never anything left that I'd want for my birthday, and then I don't get any present". It's mean, isn't it"? It's important to get something on your birthday, you know"."

"…"

Sumi and Gin were at a loss for words.

As expected, things were going a bit different at the Nogi household.

*Refers to how students in Japan need to look at the trends and strategies of past exam questions when they're learning for an exam

With the keywords "tokusatsu", "monster movies" and "R/C models" as hints, the three started searching the stores in Ines.

First, they went to a toy shop aimed at children. Lots of children from kindergarteners to elementary schoolers marveled at the shelves full of articles with shining eyes and picked up the toys from them.

"If he likes tokusatsu movies, then how about this one"? It's a toy belt with lights and a built-in voice"."

"Ah, I think that toy's from a show Tetsuo watches every Sunday morning! He'd probably like it. It costs..."

10950 yen in total for franchise-related merchandise.

"Ugh, that's a ton of money..."

Next, the three tried a hobby shop.

"Hey, what about this!?"

"A model railroad, huh"."

"If he liked the R/C model last year, this might be good as well. The price is..."

16000 yen for a starter set.

"No way, there's just no way!"

"How about a book that would be useful for studying, to prepare him for the future?"

At Sumi's suggestion, they went to a bookstore.

"Let's see... I think a set of history books or an encyclopedia would be nice. Even if he can't read the difficult characters yet, it'll surely be of use to him when he's older."

[Comprehensive Encyclopedia, all 17 volumes], 69800 yen.

[History of Japan, Old Era Edition and Divine Era Edition, all 30 volumes], 100500 yen.

"So pricey!? That much money for paper with letters on it, is this a scam!?"

They looked throug many other shops, but whenever they found something they thought would make for a nice present, it turned out to be quite expensive. As an elementary schooler, those were nothing Gin could afford with her allowance.

Her parents might give her some more money if she explained the situation to them. But if she bought it with her parents' money, it wouldn't be a present from Gin anymore. After all, it's important that you prepare the present it on your own.

"Perhaps we should fundamentally overthink our strategy..."

While they were eating gelatos at the food court of Ines, the three heroes were once again holding a strategy meeting.

"Maybe we should also visit the stores outside Ines...?"

"The thing is, would those have different stuff than the ones here?"

"Mhmm..."

Sumi crossed her arms and pondered.

"Click! I've got an idea~!"

"Oh, did something click, Sonoko?"

"If there's nothing to buy, then how about we make something ourselves~?"

"Make something...?"

Sonoko suggested that his parents might buy him the expensive presents from the stores anyhow, so they should get him something handmade instead.

"Making it ourselves... it will take time and effort, but it might work. The problem is, most toys for children are very elaborate these days. He might be a harsh critic..."

Sumi was unsure if they were able to make something he would be happy about.

"Then, let's go for a battle of material"."

"...what's that mean?"

Sonoko answered the puzzled Gin with shining eyes.

"We won't make just one, but three! He'll be happy for sure if he gets three presents, and there has to be one that he likes among them"!"

Thus, their plan for the presents was decided and the three headed towards Gin's home. So that Tetsuo or her parents wouldn't enter, they put up a sign that read "Keep out - meeting in session" on the door of Gin's room and the discussed what they should make.

They looked through various websites as well as child-rearing magazines for mothers they bought at Ines for a suitable present for a five year old boy.

"How about these"? Building bricks."

"Isn't that to childish?"

"I don't mean just square blocks. We could do cloud-shaped ones or all kinds other weird forms"."

"I see, that would stimulate his creativity. It seems like building bricks are excellent toys for intellectual development..."

"Wait a sec. Where do we get the wood to make them from?"

"Mino-san, you go into the mountains" and then you chop-chop wood with your axes"!"

"My axes aren't for cutting trees!"

"It seems like puzzles with the geography of Japan are sometimes given as presents. That's just fine. Let's make the first puzzle that doesn't have just Shikoku, but the entirety of Japan on it... He can even study the history of our country with that."

"I think we could make it since you're here, Sumi. No way I could do it by myself. I don't really know what places other than Shikoku there used to be."

"It's written in our textbooks. Look, those are the regions of Japan from before the Divine Era. By the way, if you were to ask where the Japanese capital was in these times, there are multiple possible answers..."

"ZZZZZ..."

"Sonoko fell asleep... she fell asleep with a super nice sleeping face..."

"Guh... maybe this isn't exactly something children are interested in..."

"Oh. It says that someone's dad made a wooden plane model as a present on the net." "A boy would like that. I think that would make for a wonderful present. By the way, the wood to make it..."

"Mino-san will cut it in the mountains"!"

"I told you, my axes aren't for cutting trees!"

They came up with many more ideas, including a skateboard, clothes and carved figures of the Twelve Divine Generals. But under the conditions that it had to be something they could make at home and that a child would like, the possible choices were narrowed down.

They decided to make the kendama that Sonoko proposed first, and then a board game Sumi suggested. The one that's left would be-

"Hehehe. Okay, I'm gonna make a book!"

"A book?"

"Yup. I'll think up a story, make it into a book and give it to him. You know, Sonoko said that she was writing her own novels, right? I'll just do the same."

"Waaai, I can be writer buddies with Mino-san~!"

"...uh...!"

As if her head hurt, Sumi furrowed her brows and put her hand on her forehead.

In her mind played a flashback of her own shoddy writing, the one star, the flood of critical comments...

"Gi-Gin... writing a story is more difficult than one would expect... Maybe you should try something else...?"

"Nah, it's fine! I'm bad at writing and stuff, but if I put my heart into it it'll somehow work out! It's all a matter of will!"

"Uh-huh. And we'll work on it together, so it should be all right"."

"I see... okay."

If the three of us work on it, it will turn out fine. What they're saying is right,

Sumi thought.

Sonoko took the lead as they made the kendama. She made the blueprints and design. Since the plan to have Gin cut down trees was rejected, Sumi went to a hardware store to choose the wood they needed. She studied and inspected which type of wood and grain they would need to make a fine and sturdy kendama. Finally, Gin diligently polished the newly made toy.

The board game was made with Sumi at the center. Board games were particularly popular in a country called Germany before the Divine Era and all sorts of original games were made there. Using these as a reference, Sumi came up with the rules and game design. Sumi and Sonoko made the pieces, cards and the board together.

Gin was at the center of the creation of the book. She couldn't write anything as long as a novel, so they went for a picture book instead. Although Sonoko was eager to take care of the illustrations, her pictures were too avant-garde and incomprehensible... Thus, Sumi, who was a good artist, was in charge of the drawings. Sonoko handled the proofreading of the script.

And like that, the birthday came.

Gin and the others handed Tetsuo the three finished presents.

"Woah, you're giving me three!?"

"That's right! And they're all handmade by us!"

As she saw how genuinely happy her little brother was, Gin looked cheerful as well. By the way, the finished presents that the three made were-First, the kendama. The efforts of the three paid off, as the toy didn't look any less lovely than the ones sold in stores. On the contrary: whenever the ball got caught in a cup or on the spike, it would make a sound and vibrate. The gimmick was well received by Tetsuo.

"Whe-when did we even add that feature...?"

"...no idea..."

"Ehehe", I added some secret flavor"." said Sonoko, showing her usual carefree smile.

"This is way beyond just a secret flavor" thought Sumi and Gin with their faces twitching.

Next was the board game. Sumi made it based on Japan during the Old Era. The game was made to support many players so that it could be played with friends. It had an easy 'First World War Edition' and a hard 'Second World War Edition', as well as a hidden super difficult 'Mongol Invasions Edition'.

"Basically, you have to figure out how to defend your country from the various attacking enemies. In the 'First Edition', you have many resources and allies. But in the 'Second Edition', resources are scarce and you'll have few allied troops. And in the 'Mongol Invasions Edition', our country's forces are incredibly weak, while the enemy commands the world's strongest fleet. However, there's a certain chance that a "divine wind" will come and protect the country."

Sumi's overly serious explanation made Tetsuo's eyes sparkle.

"We didn't meddle with the rules at all. We thought it'd be more fun to let Sumi have her way. This isn't anything you can buy in a store, after all."

"Uh-huh. When we three tested it out, it got surprisingly intense"."

Last up was-the picture book that they made with Gin at the center.

It wasn't a long story, but Gin was serious about the work and put all of her feelings into it.

At Tetsuo's request, Gin read the picture book to their family.

"This is kinda embarrassing, you know. I'm not exactly good at writing." said Gin awkwardly, and Sumi and Sonoko tried to cheer her on.

"That's not true, I think it's a wonderful story!"

"Yeah, yeah! Believe in yourself", Mino-san!"

Thanks to the encouragement from her two friends, Gin got motivated. She

would show and read this picture book to her brothers and parents.

"Ahem. Okay, I'm gonna read it! The title's 'The Three Little Goat Friends.' In a certain land-"

In a certain land, there lived three little goats.

The first was the diligent and overly serious 'Serious-san.'

The second one was the easy-going sleepyhead 'Carefree-san.'

The third one was 'Naughty-san', whose only good point was her liveliness.

Though the little goats all had different personalities, they were very good friends. The three were always together and helped each other out.

Even when they went out to feed, the little goats were together. Every day, they went into the forest to look for edible herbs.

When they entered the forest, Carefree-san always went first. Carefree-san is usually carefree and drowsy. But when it really counts, she always chooses the right path like she knew it from the beginning. Because of that, the others would always come across a lot of food when they followed Carefree-san.

Among the little goats, Naughty-san was the worst at finding food. She didn't even know which herbs were safe to eat.

"Uuh, can you eat this one?"

Whenever she was in doubt, Serious-san would tell her which plants were edible.

"Naughty-san, you can eat this. And this."

Serious-san was very knowledgeable. Thanks to Serious-san, Naughty-san was always able to find food.

There were also other reasons why Naughty-san was bad at finding food. Whenever she was looking for food, she would get involved in all kinds of trouble. One time, she would encounter a lost rabbit and show him the way. Another time, she would see a squirrel that couldn't cross a small river and carry it to the other side on her back. Thus, she could only ever find a little bit of

food. But at such times, Carefree-san and Serious-san would always share their food with her.

"Serious-san and Carefree-san always have to help me out, don't they?"

As Naughty-san was grumbling this, Serious-san and Carefree-san told her that it wasn't true.

"Naughty-san helps us out, as well."

"Thaaat's~ right~. I'm really grateful to Naughty-san~."

But after all, Naughty-san was glad from the bottom of her heart that Serioussan and Carefree-san were there for her.

One day, a terrible wolf came to the mountain where the little goats lived.

The hungry wolf attacked the little goats.

"Uwaah", it's a wolf"!"

The little goats desperately tried to escape. But they were no match for the wolf. With his swift legs, he wouldn't let the goats get away.

If the wolf caught them, he would surely eat them in one bite.

As the three were running as fast as they could, they saw a tiny cave and a wooden plank.

"Let's hide in this cave and use the plank to close it~!"

"Right, we'll do that! That way, the wolf won't be able to get in!"

The three tried to get into the cave. However, the cave was so tiny that only two of them would fit.

"What shall we do~!?"

"The wolf will be here soon!"

Just like Serious-san said, the wolf appeared before the three of them.

The little goats were driven into a corner.

At that moment, Naughty-san thought. I absolutely don't want Carefree-san

or Serious-san to get eaten by the wolf. And for me, who is always getting saved by those two, this is my chance to help them!

Naughty-san pushed Serious-san and Carefree-san into the cave and closed the entrance with the plank.

Serious-san and Carefree-san were shouting from inside the cave.

"Naughty-san, what are you doing!?"

"Naughty-san, that's dangerous~!"

The wolf spoke to the one remaining goat in front of the cave, Naughty-san.

"You fool! Why didn't you hide in the cave yourself?"

"Because I don't want Serious-san and Carefree-san to get eaten by you!"

"Pah, it's useless! After I have eaten you, I'll just wait here until the other two come out!"

The two inside the cave cannot stay there forever. They will get hungry, and the air inside will run out.

"If that's the case, I'll chase you away, wolf!"

Naughty-san faced the wolf. Wolves were much stronger than goats, so this seemed very foolish.

Naughty-san was bitten and kicked and wounded all over by the wolf.

But the wolf wasn't unhurt, either. Whenever Naughty-san hit the wolf with her horns, he suffered an injury.

"Such a pesky one! I have no time for the likes of you!" barked the wolf and left.

Naughty-san was covered in wounds, but she was relieved that she kept Serious-san and Carefree-san safe

Naughty-san took the plank off the cave entrance and Serious-san and Carefree-san came out from inside, looking upset.

"Naughty-san, why would you do such a thing!?"

Naughty-san answered the angry Serious-san.

"I wanted to protect Serious-san and Carefree-san. Because you're my precious friends. Serious-san and Carefree-san are my irreplaceable friends, you're more wonderful than anything else. So I wanted to protect you, no matter how painful or dangerous it is."

The little goats cried in front of Naughty-san.

"But never do something dangerous like that again!"

"Yeah", Serious-san is right. I don't want anyone of us three to go away, okay"?"

"All three of us together will friends, always and forever."

Naughty-san started crying, too. Because she was so very, very happy.

She had such wonderful friends. So she was ready to do anything for their sake. She would do more than just her best for them.

That's what Naughty-san thought.

And thus, the three little goats lived together as friends ever after...

The next day.

Gin, Sumi and Sonoko were chatting as usual in the Shinju-kan's classroom.

"I'm glad about yesterday". He liked our presents"."

"That's right. Especially the picture book was well received."

"Wasshi, you looked like you were about to cry"."

"Eh? D-did I really?"

"Aah, I never want to do that again. It was nice that we made him happy, but reading a book you wrote yourself to other people is super embarrassing!

"Hehe."

"But Mino-san's blush is so cute"."

With a bashful look and flushed cheeks, Gin - said to her dear friends:

"....hey, Sumi. Sonoko. I'm really glad that I met you two."

"What's that all of a sudden?"

"I just wanted to say it."

Gin thought—

how great it was that those two were her friends. Apart from their hero duties, it was pure happiness.

And because of that, she'd do anything for these two.

Irreplaceable friends.

It is true, they're only complete when all three of them are together.

(I wish that the three of us will be together forever...)